

Introduction

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In this second issue of Volume 4 of the TESL Working Paper Series, we are pleased to present an outstanding collection of papers from the MATESL students. These papers cover a wide range of topics, including theoretical and practical issues in the teaching of vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation, content-based instruction, the genre approach to teaching writing, group dynamics and affinity spaces, the implications of appreciative inquiry to language teaching, gendered discourse in online discussions, and two series of lesson plans.

The first three papers focus directly on the teaching of different aspects of language. In the first paper, Mehring examined key theoretical concepts in the learning and teaching of vocabulary and took these concepts to classroom practices in an action research project. His paper shows that, together with the effective use of computer technology, teachers' efforts to link theory to practice can greatly enhance language teaching. The second paper, by Kusutani, started with concrete problems of Japanese learners of English regarding the use of the copula *be*. From a systematic investigation of the nature of the English copula and how this is different from the Japanese language, she provided insightful explanations for the learners' problems and offered specific suggestions to help teachers and learners. Similar to Mehring's paper, Kusutani's piece demonstrates the necessity and usefulness of linking theoretical concepts to practical problems at the classroom level. Continuing this line of thinking, Carruthers presented a contrastive analysis of Japanese and English sound systems in order to understand the typical errors made by Japanese learners of English. Overcoming a significant shortcoming of the contrastive analysis hypothesis (Lado, 1957), namely, the ability to predict errors accurately based on a pure comparison and contrast between two given languages, Carruthers cited actual errors

made by learners to support his analysis. Again, this paper illustrates the indispensable connection between theory and practice.

The next two papers provide thorough and comprehensive overviews of two teaching approaches: content-based instruction (CBI) and the genre approach in teaching writing. In the first piece, Heo reviewed the definitions and models of CBI and considered critical issues related to this approach, such as assessment, teacher training, and application in EFL contexts. In the second piece, Kim also went beyond a review of what the genre approach is and evaluated it critically from the perspective of an EFL teacher.

The two following papers bring concepts from education and business to the context of ESL learning and teaching. In Ye and Deveau's paper, they described how group dynamics and affinity spaces thrive in computer game communities and pointed out that even though group work is used in ESL classrooms, in many cases, they lack elements of true group dynamics and affinity spaces. Starting with the observation that young students enjoy learning in games, Ye and Deveau argued that the classroom should take on more group features present in game communities. The second paper in this vein, by Bentkowski and Yamaga, explored how appreciative inquiry, which has been shown to be effective in business, can be highly relevant to ESL teaching. The authors each carried out a small-scale study, one in a business and the other in an ESL classroom, to explore the potential effects of appreciative inquiry on business gains as well as learner's self-perception about and confidence in their language abilities.

The last paper in this issue, by Dalampan, investigates a phenomenon of language use from a sociolinguistic perspective. He documented females' and males' use of gendered-features of talk in online class discussions. What he found is unexpected yet

not unexplainable: the males and females did not seem to use gendered language. Dalampan interpreted this to be a result of the discourse context of academic discussion (cf. Cameron, 1997; Lakoff, 1990). This paper clearly shows that until one examines empirical data, general claims cannot be substantiated.

As with the previous issue, and in line with the MATESL program's emphasis on the practical aspect of language learning and teaching, we continue to present lesson plans ready to be used in the classroom. Designed around the theme of travel, Chou's lesson plans are aptly dynamic in the use of multimedia and a diverse range of activities. Duke's lesson plans take a functional approach with the aim to help immigrant students with basic language skills for survival in the US. The strength of both series of lesson plans in this issue is that they aim to address specific and realistic learners' needs, as well as emphasizing context of

language use in presenting language materials.

This eclectic collection of papers, which are substantial in both size and depth, reflects the efforts of the authors as well as the co-editors' and the peer readers'. In the process of putting this issue together, each author has worked exceptionally hard with the editors and readers to make their papers stronger and better. We would like to thank all contributing authors for their excellent work. We would also like to extend our special thanks to the peer readers, Kathryn Duke and Dennis Chase, for their sharp and sophisticated comments on previous versions of these papers.

Finally, we would like to emphasize to both the readers and the authors of this issue that the papers published here are *working* papers. We hope that they will be developed further, particularly with the input from the readers, and to be published in other venues.

References

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